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REVIEW OF THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION

Critical social situation in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. In Africa, the severe economic crisis that engulfed the social sector in the 1980s has not abated. For example, the urban unemployment crisis is continuing to rise in the 1990s and will reach a projected estimate of 44 million people unemployed by the year 2000; the figure for 1991 was 14 million. The fall in real wages and income has left a large segment of the population facing primary poverty. Education, health, food and nutrition, and other areas, are characterized by social retrogression, compounded by an unprecendented growth in population rates. Severe budgetary pressures have culminated in a sharp decline in regional per capita student expenditure. Predictably, gross enrolment ratios, especially at the first level, have declined precipitously, repetition of classes has mounted and attrition rates, especially among female students, are now among the highest in the world, while educational standards have fallen below acceptable levels. In the health sector, as a result of a resurgence of previously controlled diseases, widespread malnutrition and starvation, a lack of universal immunization and drastic cuts in health expenditure, many people in the region are in a precarious state of health. The African socio-political landscape has been considerably aggravated by droughts, especially in southern Africa, where millions of people are threatened by hunger and starvation across 11 or more countries. In addition, the stabilization and structural adjustment regimes adopted by most African countries to deal with the structural imbalances of African economies have not only proved grossly inadequate for dealing with the ultimate goal of development but have considerably exacerbated the crisis in the African social sector.

2. It is against this background that the thirteenth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the critical economic situation in Africa, was convened in 1986, in response to General Assembly resolutions 39/29 and 40/40. The Assembly adopted by consensus resolution S-13/2, initiating the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990. Pursuant to those resolutions, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1989/46, requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank, to prepare an in-depth evaluation of the critical social situation in Africa, paying particular attention to any obstacles to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action.

3. The present report, containing an analysis of the recent crisis in selected areas of African social development, is submitted in accordance with the Council's request. In section I, the conclusions reached in the report are summarized; in section II, obstacles to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action are reviewed; section III contains information on major developments in some key areas of interrelated social development issues, such as health, food and nutrition, employment, income and poverty, and population and environment; and section IV deals briefly with specific population groups, namely women, youth and refugees.

I. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

4. The unprecedented economic crisis of the 1980s had calamitous effects on the African social sector and was a major obstacle to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and

Development (1986-1990). The coalescence of a number of internal and external factors, for example, domestic policy failures, compounded by political instability, military conflicts and civil strife, Africa's external debt, inhospitable external environment and the dearth of external resource flows to the region, exacerbated by widespread and indiscriminate implementation of structural adjustment programmes, was also not conducive to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

5. The continued decline in the African economies, made worse by conventional structural adjustment programmes and accentuated by unprecedented population growth rates, has left the African family and household in a crisis of unparalleled dimensions. For example, while the means to tackle the complex problems of social development are reduced, the need for social action is greatly increased. In particular, economic stabilization activities are being carried out while the development of the social sector is being neglected. The social sector (including health and education), dependent on central government budgetary appropriation, suffers as government expenditure allocations are reduced and redirected to activities with higher short-term economic rates of return. Income inequalities are accentuated and poverty is on the increase. In general, the quality of life is deteriorating. In the process, some groups suffer more than others. As is usually the case in such situations, it is the women, the young, the old and the infirm who bear the brunt of the retrenchments. This "social crisis" not only renders the solutions to the day-to-day problems difficult but also adversely affects the long-term socio-economic development of the continent. The African social crisis is greatly exacerbated by severe and persistent drought and lack of genuine democratization, culminating in some countries in insidious civil wars and internal strife. To mitigate the crisis, coherent social development policies need to be put into place, paying particular attention to all dimensions of human development, including population and the environment and the democratization process.

II. OBSTACLES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR AFRICAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT,1986-1990

6. The final review and appraisal of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 shows unequivocally that, despite heroic efforts by most African countries to deal with the structural imbalances of their economies and to implement the Programme of Action, a number of internal and external factors have conspired to hinder those efforts. This led the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly on the Final Review and Appraisal of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 to conclude that, at the end of the five-year period, Africa's socio-economic condition remained precarious and the results of the programme of action had fallen far below expectations. The socio-economic conditions as well as the purchasing power of the African people had continued to worsen and the programme of action had not contributed sufficiently to redressing the situation. This conclusion tallies with the statement in the foreword by the Secretary-General to his report on the final review and appraisal of the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action that by the end of 1990, "it had become evident that the African economic crisis had indeed deepened and that much more vigorous efforts and greater commitment were needed, particularly on the part of the international community, to place the continent firmly on the road to economic recovery and development, as well as political stability" (A/46/324, p. 3).

7. In relation to the agricultural sector, which is the mainstay of African economies and is centrally pertinent to the mandate of Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990, the commitment to emphasize the food and agricultural sector, for a variety of reasons, did not translate into a significant degree of food security, and the rise in agricultural production certainly fell short of expectations and was not sufficient to stop the decline of per capita agricultural production. This observation applies to most of the other sectors and subsectors in the programme linked to socio-economic development in the region.

8. Of the internal obstacles to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action, political instability, civil strife, military conflicts, weak institutions and, often, less than effective policies to mobilize and use domestic resources continued to be both cause and consequence of the poor economic performance of most countries. Elsewhere, the technical incapacity of Governments to implement the programme is cited as yet another internal obstacle.

9. On the exogenous side, the crippling burden of Africa's external debt and the unfavourable terms of trade have profoundly exacerbated the African socio-economic crisis and are extensively cited as being among the most important obstacles to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action. Africa's debt rose from $189 billion in 1985 to $299 billion in 1992, almost double its 1980 level and equivalent to over 90 per cent of the region's gross domestic product (GDP). 1/ Despite some concessions in bilateral debt restructuring agreements for low-income countries, the gains for sub-Saharan Africa are negligible. As a consequence, Africa was, during the implementation period, a net exporter of financial resources to the rest of the world. Deducting interest and dividend payments, financial transfers to Africa would decline in real terms from $13 billion in 1986 to $8.8 billion in 1989. In addition, the ratio of debt to the total value of the region's annual exports has risen to 237 per cent at the end of 1991, while debt service now consumes about 31 per cent of exports of goods and services. 2/

10. For some years, the decline in the prices of Africa's primary commodities has continued unabated. Given the monocultural tendencies in the African economies, the effect of this development has been a sharp decline in the terms of trade, with catastrophic consequences for Africa's financial situation. The social development sector has borne a disproportionate share of this crisis. For many countries, terms-of-trade losses of 10 percentage points may represent a loss of up to 5 per cent of GDP. Taking 1986 alone, ECA estimates that Africa lost $19 billion in foreign exchange, mainly due to the fall in commodity prices and the depreciation of the dollar.

11. Another significant exogenous factor which was inimical to the implementation of the Programme was the inadequacy of resource flows to the region, which actually declined during the period, as evidenced by the fact that, measured in 1986 prices and exchange rates, net resource flows declined, from $24.6 billion in 1986 to 23.3 billion in 1990. Official development assistance (ODA) stagnated, in real terms, to around $16 billion annually during 1986-1990, while private flows fell sharply.

12. Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) (by 1992, over 30 African countries were implementing SAPs), by their very nature, are thought to have been antithetical to the successful implementation of some aspects of the United Nations Programme of Action. For example, the restoration of macro-economic

balances over the short and medium term entails, among other things, the introduction of tight fiscal control measures designed to reduce balance-of-payment deficits, the removal of government subsidies, liberalization of trade, privatization, currency devaluations and the like. Stabilization policies have combined to slow down and retard human development, since a reduction in fiscal deficits entails drastic cuts in public expenditure, especially as it relates to the social sector. Education, training and health were particularly affected by the fiscal crunch. And yet the development, planning and use of human resources was one of the main areas covered in the United Nations Programme of Action. The removal of subsidies had devastating effects on the agricultural sector, culminating in widespread and severe food insecurity and shortages. Stabilization and adjustment policies decisively limited women's access to production resources. For example, data indicate that the massive public and private retrenchments characteristic of the latter part of the 1980s affected women more than men. Government expenditure on health care has declined by 50 per cent in recent years. Given the pre-eminent role of women in the domestic production sector, such excessive cuts in health services put the health of women and children in an extremely precarious position. Severe cuts in education and training and the introduction of user fees have also affected women more than men, as families generally prefer to invest in the education of sons rather than daughters.

III. MAJOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

A. Health

13. The unprecedented socio-economic crisis that engulfed the African region in the 1980s and has continued into the 1990s; it has had a particularly devastating effect on the health sector. Conceptualized as a consumption arena by most policy makers, rather than a critical investment in human development, the sector has been subjected to severe budgetary cuts. Consequently, the health infrastructure is in a critical state of disrepair: essential drugs are either in acutely short supply or are not available at all. The ratio of doctors to patients has become one of the worst in the world: 3/ one doctor serves an average of 22,930 persons. This means that the ratio of physicians to patients has not significantly improved in the last few years, as indicated in table 1 below. This average also masks serious differences between countries, as well as between rural and urban areas within countries. For instance, doctor-to-patient ratios were 1:60,000 in Ethiopia, 1:57,220 in Burkina Faso, 1:46,420 in Guinea, 1:39,730 in Niger, 1:38,360 in Chad and 1:37,960 in Mozambique, compared, for example, with Zambia's ratio of 1:7,150, Nigeria's of 1:7,990, Kenya's of 1:9,970 and Ghana's of 1:14,890. 4/ In addition, declining wages and inhospitable working environments have precipitated a mass exodus of health workers, especially doctors, nurses and medical technologists, in search of better employment opportunities in other regions.

14. Practically all indicators show that morbidity and mortality, including child and infant mortality (see, for example, table 2 below), and maternal mortality, are higher in Africa than in any other continent. In many countries facilities are run-down, staff are generally disillusioned, medicines are limited in quantity and variety, and sometimes are fake or out of date. While the problems in the health sector can partly be blamed on mismanagement, the core problem is lack of financial resources to pay staff and maintain the health infrastructure that burgeoned after independence, only to run into economic crisis. In such circumstances, efforts have continued to be expended

on a top-heavy, largely urban-located hospital system, leaving rural government clinics to stagnate and become incapable of maintaining both proper service and an effective referral system on which the efficient and proper use of hospitals largely depends. One result has been the growth of private urban clinics, which the growing urban poor cannot afford and which are altogether beyond the reach of the majority of rural poor.

Table 1. Ratio of population to health personnel, 1965 and 1984

Country group	1965		1984	
	Population served by each physician	Population served by each nurse	Population served by each physician	Population served by each nurse
Sub-Sahara	33 000	5 400	26 800	2 200
Middle-income countries (including North Africa)	4 000	2 200	2 500	1 000
South Africa	2 000	470	900 (urban) 4 100 (rural) b/	700 a/
Industrialized countries	870	470	450	

Source: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Social Indicators of Development, 1990 (Baltimore, Md., Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Medical Research Council of South Africa, Changing Health in South Africa: Towards Perspectives in Research (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Publications, 1991). Adapted from "Africa's children, Africa's future", background sectoral papers prepared by the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations Children's Fund for the International Conference on Assistance to African Children, held at Dakar from 25 to 27 November 1991.

a/ For some homelands, 1989.

b/ 1989.

15. On the positive side, the economic crisis has acted as a spur for the promotion of what had been the long overdue need for major emphasis on primary health care (PHC) and preventive health measures. One significant continent-wide activity in preventive health, especially since 1988, has been the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) of the United Nations system against six major killers of children: diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis and measles. This Programme has been adopted by most African countries and, where the incidence of conflict has been low, by 1991 had realized considerable coverage. That is certainly going some way towards reducing the pressures on health institutions thanks to the savings brought about in curative health care.

16. Malaria, however, which killed almost 1 million children under five years of age in Africa in 1989, cannot of course be covered by EPI. Nor can other

Table 2. Important indicators in the health of African children, 1960-1991

Countries	Mortality rate, children under 5 years of age		Infant mortality rate (under 1 year of age)		Annual number of deaths of children under 5 years of age (thousands)	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Total adult literacy rate	Percentage of age group enrolled in primary school (gross)
	1960	1991	1960	1991	1991	1991	1990	1986-1990
Algeria	243	61	148	50	53	66	57	96
Angola	345	292	208	170	153	46	42	93
Benin	310	149	184	89	34	46	23	66
Botswana	169	85	116	62	4	60	74	115
Burkina Faso	363	206	205	120	89	48	18	36
Burundi	260	181	153	108	47	48	50	69
Cameroon	270	126	163	66	60	55	54	101
Central African Republic	294	180	174	106	25	47	38	64
Chad	325	213	195	125	54	47	30	57
Congo	220	110	143	83	11	52	57	—
Côte d'Ivoire	300	127	165	93	77	52	54	70
Egypt	260	85	168	62	146	61	48	97
Ethiopia	294	212	175	125	540	46	—	38
Gabon	287	161	171	97	8	53	61	—
Ghana	224	137	132	84	90	55	60	75
Guinea	337	234	203	138	71	44	24	34
Guinea-Bissau	336	242	200	143	10	43	36	59
Kenya	202	75	120	52	79	59	69	94
Lesotho	210	137	149	82	9	60	—	107
Liberia	310	200	184	131	25	55	40	34
Libyan Arab Jamahirya	269	108	160	72	21	62	64	—
Madagascar	364	173	219	113	97	55	80	92
Malawi	365	228	206	144	123	45	—	67

continued

Table 2 (continued)

Countries	Mortality rate, children under 5 years of age		Infant mortality rate (under 1 year of age)		Annual number of deaths of children under 5 years of age (thousands)	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Total adult literacy rate	Percentage of age group enrolled in primary school (gross)
	1960	1991	1960	1991	1991	1991	1990	1986-1990
Mali	400	225	200	108	111	45	32	23
Mauritania	321	209	191	120	20	47	34	51
Morocco	265	91	163	72	77	63	50	68
Mozambique	331	292	190	170	209	47	33	68
Namibia	248	120	146	73	8	58	—	—
Niger	321	218	191	127	90	46	28	28
Nigeria	212	188	108	86	1 008	52	51	70
Rwanda	255	189	150	112	71	47	50	69
Senegal	299	182	172	82	61	49	38	58
Sierra Leone	385	253	219	146	53	42	21	53
Somalia	294	211	175	125	95	46	24	15
South Africa	126	72	89	54	88	62	—	—
Sudan	292	169	170	102	189	51	27	50
Togo	305	144	182	88	23	54	43	103
Tunisia	254	58	159	45	13	67	65	115
Uganda	223	190	133	110	174	43	48	70
United Republic of Tanzania	249	178	147	112	230	51	91	64
Zaire	300	180	174	117	333	52	72	78
Zambia	220	200	135	112	82	45	73	95
Zimbabwe	181	88	109	61	36	56	67	128

Source: United Nations Children's Fund, 1993.

diseases, especially diarrhoea, which claims the lives of over 1.5 million children annually - the World Health Organization estimates that, in 1991, 42 per cent of all cases of diarrhoea in the world occurred in Africa - and acute respiratory infections, compounded by chronic malnutrition, cause massive morbidity and death among children in Africa. In populations with a high prevalance of malnutrition, pneumonia may account for as much as 80 per cent of infant and child mortality. Compared with other regions of the world, the health of the African child is indeed in a perilous state. Thus, while the total number of deaths of children under five years of age has been decreasing worldwide, the absolute number has been increasing in Africa. In spite of falling death rates, Africa is the only part of the world where the absolute numbers of all deaths and of deaths of children under five are projected to continue to increase into the next century. It is estimated that in 1990 more than 4 million children under five years of age died in Africa. By the year 2000 it is estimated that Africa will account for nearly 39 per cent of all under-five deaths. Annual percentage declines in infant and under-five mortality in Africa for the period 1980-1990 were under 2 per cent a year. In order to attain a 50 per cent reduction by the year 2000, the rates of decline will have to double to over 4 per cent a year. 3/

17. The most pressing challenges to Africa's health landscape in the 1990s are the unprecedented rate of population growth, the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic, the recrudescence of drug-resistent malaria (of the 110 million cases of malaria occurring worldwide, 80 per cent are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa) and the virtual collapse of effective health infrastructure and services, evidenced by the resurgence of previously controlled diseases.

18. The problem that calls most urgently for consciousness-raising among individuals, families and communities in Africa is HIV/AIDS. In 1991, a senior official of the World Health Organization (WHO), addressing a conference in Namibia, warned that the disease could cut Africa's workforce by 20 per cent in the next five years. Clearly, this would have a tremendous impact on Africa's labour force, as well as compounding the problems for health budgets and facilities and for society at large. Regarding the extent of the HIV/AIDS scourge and its implications for the African region, WHO estimates that, of the now 10-12 million adults and children worldwide who are infected with HIV, up to 6 million are in sub-Saharan Africa, resulting so far in 2 million cases of AIDS. If this trend continues, WHO projections are that the number of cumulative HIV cases will rise to 30-40 million by the end of this century.

19. According to available data, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is increasing at a phenomenal rate in Africa. Thus, despite inadequate epidemiological surveillance, the number of cases reported to WHO by African countries in 1991 and early 1992 was 129,270, compared with 42,167 for the period 1979-1988. Unfortunately, HIV/AIDS coincided with the socio-economic crisis, in which education budgets were being reduced by more than 50 per cent in some countries. Predictably, the system of information, education and communication, on which so much hope of reducing the pandemic is contingent, has been mostly ineffective. To add to the problem, denial, complacency and the stigmatization of infected persons have coalesced to slow prevention and control efforts. Aggressive social mobilization is therefore needed, directed towards community participation, community opinion leaders being central to the campaign, in order to bring HIV/AIDS under effective control.

20. National development plans have tended to emphasize curative medicine and static facilities. Consequently, in many cases over 80 per cent of the registered doctors are to be found in primary cities, serving only 20-30 per cent of the total population. In a number of African countries, as much as 30-40 per cent of the public expenditure on health goes to one, or a few, teaching hospitals, which cater for an insignificant percentage of the total population, mainly in urban areas. More recently, however, there has been some change in orientation, so that while secondary and tertiary health care continue to feature prominently, more and more emphasis is being directed towards PHC, with a view to providing coverage in all-outpatient facilities, towards mother and child health care (MCH) and family planning, and towards improving drug supplies by, inter alia, closing off the routes by which they are diverted to the black market.

21. Cost-sharing in the health sector has a number of shortcomings. For instance, there is some evidence that it can undermine PHC, especially in rural areas, thereby further exacerbating the general urban bias in health care provision. Thus, following increases in user charges in the latter part of the 1980s, less frequent use of government health centres by the poor and by women, and a shift in demand to the private sector, including traditional healers and unlicensed drug sellers, was reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 4/ It is therefore recommended that PHC should be free and universal, though there could be some charges for medicine and hospital care. The latter would encourage people to use their local clinic first, with the result that hospitals would benefit from more efficient use of the referral system. Low-income families and children under five should be exempted from hospital charges.

B. Food and nutrition

22. Currently, more than 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa face exceptional food emergencies and more than 40 million Africans confront the threat of famine. 5/ According to a 1991 report by the World Food Programme in Food Aid Review, consequent to the continuous decline in per capita food production, about one quarter of the African population - over 100 million people - do not consume enough food to allow an active working life. Even more suffer in years when crops fail and food prices rise. The number of undernourished people in Africa is projected to increase to nearly 200 million by the year 2000. One of the consequences of food insecurity is the prevalence of severe malnutrition - especially protein-energy-malnutrition - which affected 30 per cent of the under-fives in Africa in 1990. Such staggering numbers of malnourished people have tremendous ramifications for Africa's long-term growth and development.

23. Consequently, improving nutrition is recognized as one of Africa's principal tasks. After being a net exporter of food in the early 1960s, the continent became a net importer of food in the 1970s and 1980s. According to the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP), African agriculture needs to be transformed so as to achieve an improved balance between export crops and food production, with price support policy (PSP) playing a key part in this. In the past, PSPs have been used successfully in Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe to achieve self-sufficiency in staple foods. It is significant that these achievements owed much to consultations with the producers of those crops. A built-in system of monitoring the achievement of objectives is important for PSP in the variable local conditions within Africa.

C. Education and literacy

24. Increased fees and cost-sharing in Africa's social sector is a direct consequence of Governments having to implement orthodox structural adjustment regimes. Applied across the board, the policy creates dilemmas and problems for the entire spectrum of social sector development. Education, literacy, training and health are critical investments in human resources and should be viewed as such, rather than treating them as arenas of consumption, which can easily be subjected to severe budgetary cuts whenever there is a fiscal crisis. In education, not only have numerous studies shown that the returns are highest for the first few years of schooling, but cost-sharing can exclude the very poor, who represent a major part of Africa's population and on whom so much future productivity, recovery and development depend. 6/ Education, especially for females, is particularly important, as it branches out into so many other areas that are inseparably linked to the entire development process. For instance, female education is shown to be inversely correlated to high levels of fertility, which exert insupportable pressure on limited social infrastructures. Female education also has a positive effect on the nutritional status of families, as well as on other areas, thereby reducing Africa's infant and maternal morbidity and mortality, which rank among the highest in the world.

25. In Africa, the drop-out rate is aggravated in most countries by the need to pay school fees and other educational costs, especially those involved in the loss of children's labour. Low female enrolment and high female drop-out and repeater rates are still characteristic of many African countries' educational sectors. Yet user charges are bound to roll back the advances made in sub-Saharan Africa in female education, because families with limited resources will tend to invest in their sons' education first, since their daughters are lost to them when they marry. 6/

26. There are now indications that gross enrolment ratios, especially at the first level, are declining in sub-Saharan Africa. Disillusionment is rapidly setting in as parents find their children not only unable to secure the much-hoped-for wage employment but also confused in terms of the farming on which the future of most of their families depends. In addition, declining real wages, consequent to spiralling inflation, have culminated in the departure or irregular attendance of qualified teachers, thereby exacerbating the crisis in the educational sector.

27. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a process of declining school enrolment, rather than the consolidation of school systems, is to be found in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa. In many instances, primary school does not provide real education for self-reliance for the 95 per cent who do not go on to secondary schools. The poor availability of facilities, equipment and supplies may add to the problem of absenteeism. 7/ Indeed, in many African countries the massive achievements in quantitative educational growth that characterized the post-independence era have been poisoned by qualitative decay, not only in the quality of learning but also in physical equipment.

28. After extraordinary gains, African Governments now not only have to try to implement policies of consolidation, but also to stop the rot. At the same time, there is vibrant activity in the private sector of education, especially in urban areas. This covers a wide spectrum, for example, day-care centres and computer training establishments. So various compromises between government

and private sectors may be timely; but the very poor, as long as they remain very poor, cannot benefit from this trend.

29. The emphasis of United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO has in recent years been on basic education through the early stages of primary schooling. This is a key foundation if both rural and urban poor are to contribute their due quota to social development. The subject of user charges has already been raised. Governments are generally likely to maintain most of their financial, administrative and other commitments to primary education, and to expand user charges more strongly at higher levels of both education and specialized training; but primary school fees have become more common, as many countries have had to reduce their expenditure on education because of the economic crisis. The introduction of cost-recovery schemes means that drop-out rates have risen and education has become inaccessible to the very poor. Cutting back on expenses because of the economic crisis and the introduction of cost sharing have meant that crucial priorities have had to be shelved.

30. A common characteristic in African education is that greater drop-out rates among female students combine with higher male and female drop-out rates, generally in rural schools, which themselves are disadvantaged compared with schools in urban areas, among other things because the quality of teaching is inferior. As in many parts of the developing world, girls are taken out of school before or at about the time they first menstrate, partly so that they do not form alliances that are outside parental control.

31. Given the present and foreseeable realities in Africa, all students should be exposed to entrepreneurial training. Adult training in numeracy is appreciated by petty traders, however, many of whom are rural women who need to be numerate to be able to make use of improved credit availability.

32. In Africa, 70 per cent of the adult population remains illiterate, and in rural Africa the proportion is 90 per cent. These high rates of illiteracy impede the introduction of modern development ideas and technologies and limit people's chances of improving their situation and claiming the rights and privileges that are due to them. It is in the rural areas that such opportunities and skills are most needed, and it is the rural women, especially, who are most often illiterate. Moreover, it is not just that the poor need help; rather, Africa will remain debilitated if they are not able to contribute to their own development and that of their countries. The interdependence of economic and social sectors leads to the need to invest in human resources. Social sector policies influence economic performance through the level of investment in human resources. Similarly, the tension between the impact of adjustment on women and the impact of women on adjustment is similar to that between the need for poverty alleviation measures, on the one hand, and the need for the adjustment package to include measures that will empower the poor to make an economically efficient contribution to adjustment, on the other hand. 6/ Since it is now a well-established fact that adult literacy programmes tend to benefit men more than women, special efforts should be made to target women.

33. In addition, it has been found in Ethiopia, for example, that quite a sizeable proportion of pupils in the first grade have been drawn from the younger graduates of the literacy campaigns. Many of these in rural areas are in their teens and twenties, compounding the disadvantage of females: female literacy graduates over 12 years of age are, unlike males, often prevented by

tradition from continuing with their education by entering elementary schools. That is probably one reason why daytime adult education classes are so popular among women. Evening classes after dark again run into conflict with traditional norms, especially in rural areas. 6/ These facts need to be kept in mind when Governments attempt to expand non-formal education for women, otherwise the women may again be at a disadvantage, and rural women more than urban women.

34. The problem of gender bias, or "gender typing", in school subjects still affects non-formal education as well. Over a decade ago, ECA estimated that domestic science made up more than 50 per cent of all the non-formal education offered to women. That situation still needs to be adjusted to meet what women themselves perceive as their learning requirements, such as numeracy that leads to cash-making skills. This gives weight to the findings of macro-level studies, namely, that countries with more literate populations have higher economic growth rates.

D. Employment

35. The unemployment crisis that characterized the African economy in the 1980s is continuing into the 1990s. Thus, estimates indicate that total productive employment (see table 3 below) expanded by 2.4 per cent in 1991, while the labour force grew by about 3.2 per cent. Projections made in 1992 by the ILO/Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA) are that this trend will continue, as unemployment rises from its current levels of 14 million to 44 million by the end of this century. In urban areas the employment problem is caused, on the one hand, by limited opportunities for self-employment, lack of investable capital and excess capacity in existing enterprises, which limit the growth of demand for labour. On the other hand, the unprecedented migration of rural populations (displaced by war and the collapse of agriculture and rural services) to the urban areas tends to increase the supply of labour. In some areas, drought, degradation of the physical environment, failing agriculture, war and rapid population growth have coalesced to hold down the numbers of people in productive employment.

36. Despite the central position of agriculture in the African economies and societies - it occupies about two thirds of the labour force and 80 per cent of the working women - there was a serious decline in employment in agriculture in the latter part of the 1980s. The active population is heavily concentrated in agriculture, except for North Africa, where there is more sectoral differentiation. The decline in opportunities for agricultural employment should, however, be linked with suspected high rates of underemployment, especially in subsistence agriculture, where productivity is depressed because of lack of credit and of marketing outlets and not so much because of limits in inputs and technology. Because of all these factors, the rural areas are the genesis of Africa's employment problem.

37. An excessive brain drain is occurring simultaneously with the appearance of shortages in the supply of specific skills in the labour market. This disequilibrium is in part a reflection of the structural problems of the labour market. Wage employment, which in the case of Africa brings in more income, covers a small part of the population, and the prospects for productive family employment and self-employment in the rural areas are severely limited by declining labour and land productivity in agriculture. The primary sector is still undeveloped, as, indeed, are the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. The growing numbers of urban poor can be related more particularly

Table 3. Paid employment in selected African countries, 1982-1991
(Thousands)

Country	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Benin	73.6	81.1	73.9	80.8	77.2	77.7	78.3	47.3	45.7
Botswana	100.2	100.5	110.0	116.2	130.1	150.2	169.5	175.6	2 090.0
Burundi	44.2	40.8	44.1	44.7	47.3	49.8	54.3	48.6	47.3
Côte d'Ivoire	446.8	432.5	417.2	406.0	410.0	405.9	404.4	399.9	385.0
Ghana	279.6	312.0	450.8	464.3	413.7	394.3	306.8	..	..
Kenya	1 046.0	1 093.3	1 119.7	1 174.4	1 220.5	1 264.5	1 311.0	1 355.5	1 409.0
Malawi	329.8	391.4	384.4	401.6	417.2	412.0	432.1	441.5	451.1
Mauritius	194.2	191.5	195.7	209.5	230.7	252.3	267.2	270.5	278.8
Niger	25.7	20.3	21.4	22.5	26.1	27.9	26.0	28.0	29.5
Seychelles	18.5	17.5	17.9	18.2	18.8	19.5	21.2	22.3	23.5
Swaziland	77.4	78.7	77.4	72.9	76.4	82.7	85.9	..	..
Togo	43.7	66.9	61.8	61.2	62.0	63.9	..	..	..
Zambia	367.5	363.8	365.2	361.5	360.5	361.8	360.7	359.6	356.5

Source: Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1992 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1992), as quoted in International Labour Organisation/Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA), African Employment Report, 1992.

Note: Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available.

to the manifest underdevelopment of the manufacturing sector. Employment in the public sector accounts for a large part of the wage employment but also has a large component of underemployment. By far the largest proportion of the unemployed are females and young people.

38. The narrow assumptions underlying concepts of employment and related training are at the heart of the mismatch between training and employment. On a more day-to-day level, as with other social development projects, technical training institutions in Africa have suffered so much from cutbacks resulting from the economic crisis that their courses are often mainly theoretical, because the facilities for practical training are either absent or unrepaired. If, however, such facilities and equipment are present and used, trainees frequently find, when they start work, that the equipment they have been trained for is not available.

E. Income and poverty

39. Compared with the rest of the world (see table 4), per capita income in sub-Saharan Africa has continued to decline, with disastrous effects on the living standards of a significant proportion of the population now living in primary poverty. This trend is confirmed by data from UNDP, 8/ which indicate that of the 20 countries with the lowest Human Development Indicators (HDI), 18 are to be found in Africa. Consequently, sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in which poverty is expected to worsen, with significant increases in the proportion of the population living in poverty. The World Bank estimates that this number will increase by nine million annually. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line in sub-Saharan Africa was 47.6 per cent in 1985 and 47.8 per cent in 1990 and this is expected to rise to 49.7 per cent in 2000. Thus, nearly half of the population will live below the poverty line, which the World Bank estimates to be $420 annual income per capita. 9/ In other words, the number of people living in absolute poverty in sub-Saharan Africa will have risen from 181 million in 1986 and 216 million in 1990 to 304 million by the year 2000.

F. Population and the environment

40. The inseparable link between environmental stability and long-term socio-economic development is now widely accepted. The United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s contains the following statements: "the problems of environment and development should be tackled in an integrated and balanced manner" and "Africa is fully committed to the promotion of sustainable development at all levels of socio-economic activity" (General Assembly resolution 46/151, annex, sect. II, para. 17) thereby acknowledging the interrelationship between environment and development. In Africa, as elsewhere among the poor countries, the single most important factor behind environmental degradation is poverty. Thus, the search for energy, over-grazing, over-cultivation and the application of such archaic agricultural methods as slash-and-burn, accelerate deforestation, which ultimately leads to increased soil erosion and floods. Furthermore, environmental degradation diminishes the capacity of affected countries to produce food, a problem that is frequently compounded by perennial droughts, which are themselves a consequence of environmental instability.

41. Environmental sustainability can only be maintained by paying particular attention to the issue of human development, because of its ramifications on overall socio-economic development. Most of the World Bank's World Development

Table 4. Growth in real per capita income, 1960-1992
(Average annual percentage change)

Country group	1960-1970	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990	1991 a/	1990-1992
High income countries	4.1	2.4	2.4	2.1	0.7	2.1
Developing countries	3.3	3.0	1.2	-0.2	-0.2	2.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.6	0.9	-0.9	-2.0	-1.0	0.3
Asia and the Pacific	2.5	3.1	5.1	3.9	4.2	4.8
East Asia	3.6	4.6	6.3	4.6	5.6	5.7
South Asia	1.4	1.1	3.1	2.6	1.5	3.1
Middle East and North Africa	6.0	3.1	-2.5	-1.9	-4.6	1.6
Latin America and Caribbean	2.5	3.1	-0.5	-2.4	0.6	2.2
Europe	4.9	4.4	1.2	-3.8	-8.6	1.9
Eastern Europe	5.2	5.4	0.9	-8.3	-14.2	1.6

Source: World Bank, World Development Report 1992: Development and the Environment, World Development Indicators (Washington, D.C., Oxford University Press, 1992), as quoted in International Labour Organisation/Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa, African Employment Report, 1992.

a/ Estimated.

Report 1992 is devoted to the issue of development and the environment. On poverty and the environment, the argument is made, that "alleviating poverty is both a moral imperative and a prerequisite for environmental sustainability. The poor are both victims and agents of environmental damage". 10/ Thus, policies for development should include investment in people through education, health and nutrition, and family planning. "Investments in water and sanitation and in pollution abatement will also benefit the poor by improving their health and productivity. But it is equitable economic growth, coupled with education and health services, that is most urgently needed. This will enable the poor to make environmental investments that are in their own long-term interest. It will be essential for accelerating the demographic transition; better-off and better-educated couples have fewer children." 11/

42. While the relationship between rapid population growth rates and environmental damage is not a unilinear one, in areas of relative and extreme land scarcity rapid population increases are known to be antithetical to environmental stability, as they frequently exert undue pressure on land. Of this relationship, Agenda 21 asserts that "the human dimensions are key elements to consider in this intricate set of relationships and they should be adequately taken into consideration in comprehensive policies for sustainable development. Such policies should address the linkages of demographic trends and factors, resource use, appropriate technology dissemination, and development. Population policy should also recognize the role played by human beings in environmental and development concern". 12/

43. In specific relation to agricultural production, the World Bank's World Development Report 1992 asserts that:

> "Agricultural stagnation in sub-Saharan Africa is a particularly clear example of the mutually reinforcing nexus of poverty, population growth, and environmental damage. The slowly evolving intensification that occurred in the first half of this century was disrupted by the sharp acceleration of population growth in the past four decades. Low agricultural productivity, caused mainly by poor incentives and poor provision of services, has delayed demographic transition and encouraged land degradation and deforestation, which in turn lowered productivity. Africa's forest declined by 8 per cent in the 1980s; 80 per cent of Africa's pasture and range areas show signs of damage; and in such countries as Burundi, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mauritania and Rwanda fallow periods are often insufficient to restore soil fertility." 13/

IV. SPECIAL POPULATION GROUPS

A. Women

44. Women are one of the key contributors to development, whether as members of households or heads of households (including single households). There is a long history, from the time of the colonial administrators, of assumptions that land in Africa is "owned" by household heads, and that, for all intents and purposes, household heads are men. This has been unfortunate on many counts. In most of Africa, people have had rights to the use of land, often for life, rather than privately owning it in the narrow capitalist sense, and the imported assumptions usually ignored women's rights to land. These assumptions still persist, and they extend to the receipt of inputs and membership

of non-traditional key decision-making associations. The assumptions ride rough shod over intra-household rights, duties, exchange systems and accounting units. As pointed out by the World Bank in its World Employment Report 1991, the nature of intra-household markets, compounded by the bias in farm support services towards male accounting units, has led to a misallocation of household-level resources. Such markets are not static in character. Per capita resources alter, as do opportunities above the household level, and to say that freeing prices will lead to the most efficient use of household resources is to ignore the terms of which intra-household markets operate.

45. Moreover, government policies that place great emphasis on long-established tradeable crops lead to women losing their rights over land because the household reduces the land available to the crops that women have traditionally controlled, especially food crops. This is particularly critical on smaller farms. This in turn diminishes women's prerogative to take decisions. Adjustment, by giving price incentives to tradeables, essentially exercises the same forces as the colonial promotion of cash crops. The result of that experience has been the misuse of women's labour to the point where children's labour is used more intensively. There is nothing to suppose that adjustment programmes will have a different effect. 6/

46. With land privatization, the mother's need for children's assistance will most likely increase as she is distanced from traditional support networks. This is bound to affect school enrolment and may indeed be one of a number of reasons for recent falls in enrolment in some parts of the continent. Nutrition will also be influenced detrimentally. One of the main policies required in promoting the productivity of low-income farmers without threatening the nutrition, health and welfare of women and children is to give priority to programmes geared towards the production of basic food crops such as yams, coco yams, millet, guinea corn, groundnuts, and palm oil. Supporting changes are needed in research, extension and the supply of inputs, all of which are biased against smaller farmers and against food crops. 6/ They are thus particularly biased against female agricultural producers and their ability to market their products and care for their families.

47. One of the worst aspects of ignoring the traditional position of women is the way in which policies regarding access to credit are implemented when it comes to private property, land privatization and the requirement of collateral.

48. The World Bank sees land adjudication and registration as an important pillar of agricultural adjustment. The change from a system of sharing, according to need, in the joint patrimony of conjugal dependants and progeny to a system of private ownership is expected to enhance farmers' incentives to invest in higher productivity. In the vast majority of cases, land is registered in the names of men. Some female heads of household succeed in gaining ownership, but very rarely do married women become the registered owners.

49. The latter are in a very disadvantageous position when it comes to obtaining credit, since without ownership they have a problem with financial institutions regarding collateral; what matters here is the owner, not the user, of the land. So women's access to and control over resources are damaged, which lowers their status both in the family and in society. This can have telling results on health and nutrition, education and training. If the acreage of household plots for self-provisioning agriculture incorporated in typical

schemes is to be emulated by the new private male farmer, then the traditional resource base for women's traditional economic responsibilities disappears and until new norms of responsibility corresponding to access to resources appear, the maintenance and reproduction of the family could be in chaos. 6/

B. Youth

50. As African nations became independent, new opportunities and, especially, new expectations opened up. Education rapidly expanded and stimulated this trend still further. Educated youth, often encouraged by their families, looked to urban centres for a future in the modern world. Many seemed persuaded that rural areas were backward, offering them no bright new future; remaining there - or returning there - was perceived as tantamount to failure, and they lived in hopes of finding "educated" employment. Thus, increasing numbers of school leavers are now unemployed and the duration of unemployment is getting longer and longer. In this regard, one of the social issues that has exercised Governments in recent decades has been how to occupy youth who have passed out of the educational system but are without work.

51. Youth unemployment, as indicated above, overlaps the issue of internal migration. In Africa, as in so many developing parts of the world, it has been young people and males who have dominated rural-urban migration. This massive movement into the cities creates a real danger of rural stagnation, stagnation that in Africa generally includes not only rural areas but also many small and intermediate urban centres. This phenomenon touches on a conundrum epitomized in the urban drift and ever-rising urban unemployment: the relations between education and development. Even emphasis on technical and vocational training cannot easily solve the problem; such training needs an economic context into which those trained can be absorbed. At the same time, the key economic sector in most African countries is agriculture, on which for the time being the overall economic context and the labour force rely. So there is a vicious circle, which must be broken.

C. Refugees and displaced persons

52. According to the most recent estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are approximately 17 million refugees worldwide - almost half of these are said to be in the African region (and about half of all African refugees are thought to be in the Horn of Africa). Thus, the refugee problem has become one of the most critical social development issues in Africa. The problem is symptomatic of the inadequate protection of human rights and extremes of poverty and represents a major loss of productive potential. Refugees are also a great burden on host Governments and host communities.

53. Internally displaced persons, now estimated to number 17 million, have frequently fallen between various stools, sometimes being forced into begging and other basic survival strategies. In addition to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their national committees have played a major role in assisting the displaced, especially in cases of conflict. Quantifying, let alone adequately assisting, the displaced is a daunting task. When a city or town is swollen with displaced persons, there is some possibility of making a fair approximation of the number involved. That is more difficult in rural areas, as are the

logistics of providing aid, though it is partly in search of the latter that displaced people head for towns.

54. The policy of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees places increased emphasis on a holistic approach to the problem of refugees and displacement. This was succinctly enunciated in the statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Third Committee of the General Assembly on 7 November 1991, when she set out a three-point strategy of prevention, emergency response capacity and solutions. Having commented that ethnic and national tensions, which had been dormant for long, were now emerging, the High Commissioner distanced herself from overly legalistic and bureaucratic distinctions between the displaced and refugees and said that the plight of the internally displaced must be an important component of the strategy of prevention (A/C.3/46/SR.34, paras. 31 and 33).

55. The High Commissioner pointed out that voluntary repatriation must be accompanied by efforts to create proper conditions for repatriation as part of the national development effort (ibid., para. 35). The implication is that Governments in Africa have to incorporate this process into their national plans and pay greater attention to them in social and economic development terms.

Notes

1/ See V. P. Diejomaoh, "The African employment challenges of the 1990s and the role of the social partners in employment promotion", paper presented to the International Labour Organisation/African Regional Labour Administration Centre Seminar on the Social Partners and Structural Adjustment, held at Harare from 3 to 7 August 1992.

2/ "Preliminary assessment of the performance of the African economy in 1992 and prospects for 1993", end-of-year statement by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, 1992.

3/ "Africa's children, Africa's future", background sectoral paper prepared by the Organization for African Unity and the United Nations Children's Fund for the International Conference on Assistance to African Children, held at Dakar from 25 to 27 November 1992.

4/ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1991 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991).

5/ "Food security in Africa", African Recovery, No. 6, September 1992.

6/ Ingrid Palmer, Gender and Population in the Adjustment of African Economies: Planning for Change (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1991).

7/ World Education Report (Paris, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1991).

8/ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1992 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992).

9/ International Labour Organisation/Job and Skills Programme for Africa, African Employment Report (Addis Ababa, International Labour Office, 1992).

10/ World Bank, World Development Report 1992: Development and the Environment (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), chap. 1, p. 30.

11/ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

12/ See the report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (A/CONF.151/26), vol. I, chap. 5, para. 5.3. (The final version of the report will be issued as a United Nations sales publication.)

13/ World Bank, World Development Report 1992 ..., Overview, pp. 7-8.